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### SERO Fall 2003

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## FL: Support Animal Friend Plate

**F**lorida wants to join the ranks of states offering license plates to help fund companion animal sterilization efforts. SERO has joined Florida Voices for Animals, the Animal Rights Foundation of Florida, and the Florida Animal Control Association in a campaign for an Animal Friend license plate.

It won't be easy. Florida has strict requirements and steep costs for creating new license plates. Organizers have to raise a total of \$89,000 and gather 15,000 signatures of licensed Florida drivers who say they would purchase the plate when it is available. Of that amount, \$60,000 goes to the state for production of the plate, \$19,000 goes to a survey company to verify the signatures, and another \$10,000 is to promote the plate. All this must be done by December 1 of this year.

If we can meet the deadline, lawmakers must then approve the plate during the 2004 legislative session. Luckily, Rep. Nan Rich has been a driving force in organizing the campaign and plans on working hard for its passage. Sen. Debbie Wasserman-Schultz has agreed to be the Senate sponsor.

Once approved by the Legislature, the Animal Friend license plate would be available in 2005 for an additional cost of \$25. All profits from the sale of the plates will go into the Florida Plate for Paws grant fund. A state appointed committee

*continued on page 4*

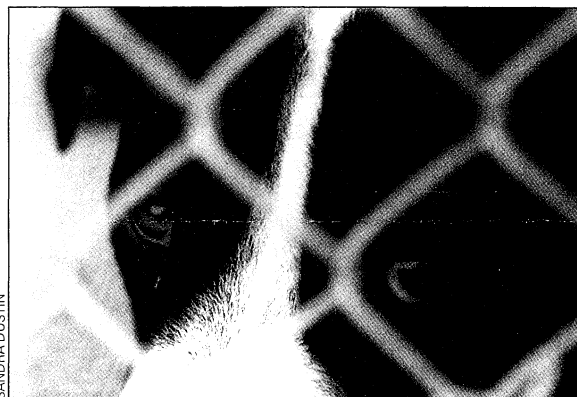
## FL Victory Against Animal Fighters

**A**fter five years of effort, Florida has a new animal fighting statute that gives law enforcement the legal tools it needs to combat blood sports in the state. The passage of the new law was a priority for SERO, and has already resulted in major cockfighting busts in Florida.

In the closing moments of the 2003 legislative session, lawmakers passed the bill written and lobbied by SERO and the Animal Rights Foundation of Florida that would make it a felony to own, possess, sell, breed, or transport animals for fighting. It also increased the penalty for being a spectator at a fight from a misdemeanor to a felony. A month later, Gov. Jeb Bush signed the bill into law and gave Florida one of the country's toughest animal fighting laws.

In the past, dog- and cockfighters blatantly advertised in newspapers and on the Internet. Most law enforcement agencies knew the identities of local fighters, however, the interpretation of the law was that only the actual fighting of the animals was a felony offense.

Our efforts on behalf of the animal fighting bill were bolstered by a new federal law, which HSUS lobbied for, making it illegal to transport fighting roosters across state lines or out of the country. During past legislative sessions, Florida cockfighters admitted they raised the birds for fighting, but claimed they only fought them in other states (Louisiana and New Mexico) or countries where the blood sport is still legal. Once the transport of the birds for fighting was a violation of federal law, and the actual fighting was already a felony in Florida, we argued that having the gamefowl, fighting paraphernalia, and equipment should in itself be illegal.



SANDRA DUSTIN

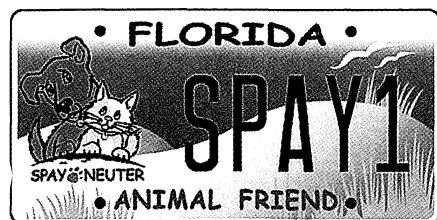
**A new Florida law puts teeth into the state's animal fighting prohibitions.**

Still, it was not an easy task to gain passage of the bill. Two organizations representing gamefowl breeders and cockfighters tried to convince legislators that cockfighting is a harmless "sport." Others raised the concern that owning a rooster or dog of the type used for fighting would by itself be illegal. With some minor amendments, that issue was negated. However, the vote went down to the wire, with some legislators trying to legalize cockfighting and kill the bill altogether.

SERO extends heartfelt thanks to sponsors Sen. Ron Klein of Palm Beach County and Rep. Gus Barreiro of Dade County for their hard work and support. Also to be commended is our original House sponsor, Rep. Marco Rubio of Dade County. Sen. Jim Sebesta of Pinellas County and Senate President Jim King of Duval County deserve praise for stepping in and rallying Senate support that last day.

SERO is now offering training on investigating animal fighting to law enforcement and animal control agencies throughout the state. If you would like to assist our efforts to combat animal fighting in Florida, please contact our office.

*continues to sidebar on page 3*





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# Gambling Threatens Greyhounds

Another run is being made to legalize casino-style gambling in Florida, and the effort is once again to the detriment of racing greyhounds. A constitutional amendment being proposed for 2004 would allow for expanded gambling at the seven horse and dog racetracks in Broward and Miami-Dade counties.

The HSUS continues to oppose any effort to bolster the greyhound racing industry by increasing gambling at dog tracks. The industry is in severe decline, and eventually the use and abuse of these wonderful dogs could come to an end. However, with the additional money brought in by casino gambling, the dogs would continue to run in order for the track to keep its license, even if no one actually bets on the outcome of the races.

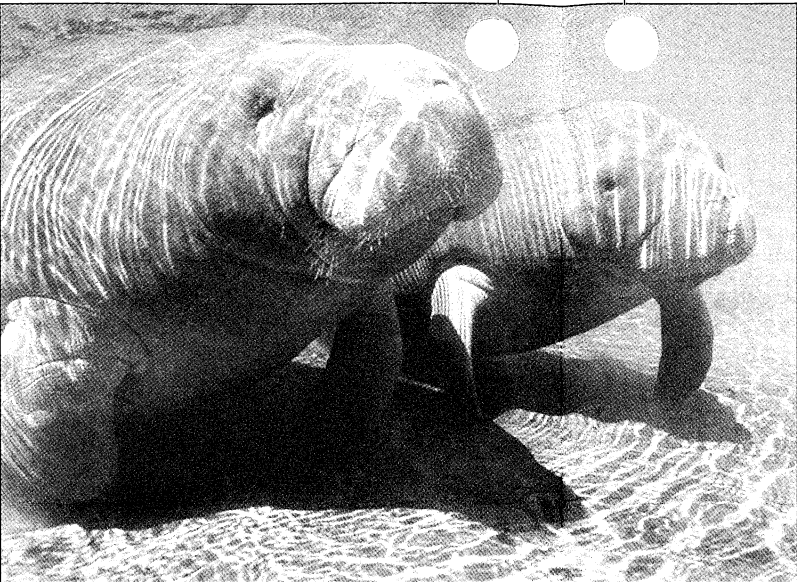
Sponsors of the gambling amendment are seeking approval from the Florida Supreme Court for the amendment language. If the court approves the wording, they will need to collect nearly 500,000 voter signatures for the amendment to be placed on the November 4, 2004, ballot.

Florida voters have already rejected state constitutional amendments legalizing casino-style gambling three times in the last 25 years. We hope that animal lovers in Florida will continue to oppose attempts to expand gambling in the state. Hopefully, we will see the day when greyhounds are companion animals, not the disposable byproducts of a dying racing industry.

# Florida Manatee Dodges Political Dangers

It has been a tough year for the Florida Manatee. But manatee supporters continue to fight to keep the species' status as "endangered" and to maintain state funding for manatee programs.

First, bills aimed at gutting the Manatee Trust Fund were filed in the Florida Legislature. The fund supports manatee protection research with the profits from the sale of the Save the Manatee license plates. Lawmakers sought to reassign the funds to pay for marine law enforcement in those counties with the most manatee deaths. While the proposal sounded good—providing more law enforcement on the water to slow boaters down in some high mortality counties—it would have had a significantly negative impact by greatly reducing manatee



# Free-Roaming Cat Fight

Florida has become a major battleground over the protection of wildlife and the control of free-roaming cats. At the end of May, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) adopted a controversial policy against free-roaming cats that has elicited an outcry from cat lovers nationwide.

When the FWC first proposed its policy, it was decidedly anti-cat and sought to eliminate all feral cat colonies in the state. There was no consideration as to whether the colonies were on state wild lands, or whether there were committed caretakers of the cats who were providing sterilization and other medical services, as well as food, water, and shelter.

In response, SERO encouraged the FWC to reconsider the harshness of its proposed policy and provided the agency with HSUS materials from our Safe Cats campaign, which seeks to encourage cat owners to keep their pets indoors. We also provided extensive information on programs that have been successful in humanely regulating and reducing feral cat populations in other parts of the country.

At the end of May, we participated in the FWC's public hearing on the policy. We again expressed concern with some aspects of the policy and requested that any decision be postponed until further input could be taken from all interested parties. However the Commission



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went ahead and approved a policy against free-roaming cats, albeit softened to limit some aspects to the state wild lands it regulates.

SERO continues to offer expertise and materials to the FWC as it decides how to implement the new policy. We hope that a balance will be struck between the needs of wildlife and free-roaming cats. For more about The HSUS's Safe Cats campaign or our "Statement on Free-Roaming Cats," please go to [www.hsus.org/safecats](http://www.hsus.org/safecats).

research, education, and protection. The bills progressed through committee, but after public and media outcry, they were amended to allow the funding for law enforcement to come from an existing marina tax whose monies currently go to pay for repairs to state roads.

While the Legislature was still considering gutting the Manatee Trust Fund and dismantling its programs, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) moved up its hearing on downlisting the manatee from "endangered" to "threatened" from November to May. The move was shocking

because the FWC's own staff had not completed the research it said it needed to justify the downlisting. Also, an independent federal study determined that the manatee's outlook for long-term survival was more grim than originally presumed.

Again, the public outcry won the day when the FWC postponed action on the downlisting until fall. We will continue to oppose any effort to downlist the manatee. If you would like to assist us in our efforts to protect this gentle, endangered animal, please contact our office.

# SERO Continues Efforts Against Dogfighting

In late April, SERO staff worked with The HSUS's Mid-Atlantic Regional Office, several state police agencies, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and multiple local animal welfare agencies on cases involving dogfighting suspects in Georgia, Virginia, and New York. Simultaneous search warrants were executed at the residences of the alleged current and former publishers of *Sporting Dog Journal*—an underground publication long suspected of furthering illegal dogfighting activities. A third warrant was also executed at the home of a person who allegedly has written books and made videos about dogfighting. While the cases in Georgia and Virginia are still under investigation and charges may follow, James Fricchione of New York (allegedly the current publisher of *Sporting Dog Journal*) has been charged with multiple counts of animal fighting. Authorities seized 18 dogs at Fricchione's residence.



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In May, SERO staff conducted seminars on investigating illegal animal fighting for law enforcement officers in Columbia and Charleston, South Carolina. More than 100 officers attended, and the training soon paid off. Just 10 days later, the Orangeburg County Sheriff's Department uncovered a major dogfighting ring. Armed with a search warrant, the deputies raided the home of a suspected dogfighter, arrested him and his wife, and seized more than 50 dogs, as well as a cache of dogfighting equipment, including a bloody fighting pit. SERO Program Coordinator Sandy Christiansen was ecstatic to hear of the raid. "It's fantastic to see officers attend our training and so quickly put it to good use." Christiansen traveled back to South Carolina to help officers evaluate the volumes of evidence collected.

June saw the second National Illegal Animal Fighting Task Force (NIAFTF) meeting held in conjunction with a dogfighting investigations seminar in New Orleans. Approximately 100 participants from Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, and Mississippi attended. SERO staffers Christiansen and Jackie McTigue assisted with the training. The purpose of the NIAFTF is to assist law enforcement officers, animal control agencies, and humane investigators in combating illegal animal fighting.

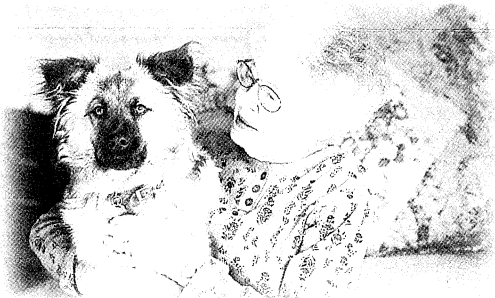
## I want to learn how I can help our animal friends and The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS).

Please send me information about

- ☐ Making a memorial donation to honor the life of a pet, friend, or relative.
- ☐ Providing for my pets in my will and in case of emergency.
- ☐ Planning my estate and will to help animals and The HSUS.

- ☐ Using charitable gift annuities and trusts to support The HSUS.
- ☐ Giving The HSUS a gift of stock.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_  
DAYTIME PHONE \_\_\_\_\_  
E-MAIL (OPTIONAL) \_\_\_\_\_



Promoting the protection of all animals

**THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES**  
SOUTHEAST REGIONAL OFFICE  
1624 Metropolitan Circle, Suite B  
Tallahassee, FL 32308

# Director's Report



## By Laura Bevan

*Director of the Southeast Regional Office*

### Of Times Best and Worst

In *A Tale of Two Cities*, Charles Dickens opened his novel with the words: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." I do believe that accurately describes the first half of 2003 for our office. While we finally made headway in our campaign against animal fighting (which I consider to be one of the most heinous forms of animal cruelty), we were just trying to maintain our footing on such issues as manatee protection and the regulation of free-roaming cats.

It is hard to describe the ecstatic feeling of getting the law passed to make all aspects of animal fighting in Florida a felony. It has been extremely frustrating throughout my career with The HSUS to see dog- and cockfighters openly advertise their existence, but not be able to do anything about it unless they were caught in an actual fight. I hope that other states in the Southeast take Florida's lead in strengthening their laws against dog- and cockfighting. These are activities that have no place in civilized society.

It won't be easy though. Florida is considered a progressive state, but we still

had to fight tooth and nail for the Animal Fighting Bill's approval. It was a first-time lobbying effort for SERO Program Coordinator Sandy Christiansen, who helped rewrite this year's bill soon after starting on the job last fall. We are both still a bit shell-shocked from the overall experience, which consumed months of our time and put a lot of new white hair on our heads.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC's) actions this year against free-roaming cats and manatees have been confusing as well as frustrating. The proposed downlisting of the manatee has no basis in scientific fact; in reality it is contrary to existing science that says the manatee is in even greater danger than earlier predicted. The Commission seems to be taking revenge on Save the Manatee Club, The HSUS, and others for a past lawsuit that sought enforcement of existing manatee protections. While no one likes to be sued, the FWC shouldn't punish the manatee for human actions.

It is the same with the free-roaming cat policy the FWC adopted. The HSUS has long promoted cats as members of the family who should be kept indoors for their own safety and for the protection of native wildlife. However, we also recognize that it is hard to change cat owners' habits to allow their pets to roam. There are also large numbers of cats who are stray or feral. These cats are victims themselves of human irresponsibility.

I had hoped that the FWC would seek to balance the needs and protection of wildlife with the promotion of realistic and humane programs for the control of cats. Instead, the free-roaming cat policy has created even greater divisiveness between cat lovers and those whose priority it is to care for wildlife. Being both (I have a 19-year-old indoor cat named Chassie and a backyard habitat for wild birds), I believe that balance can and should be found.

### Contacting HSUS

**Write:**  
HSUS Southeast Regional Office  
1624 Metropolitan Cir., Ste. B  
Tallahassee, FL 32308

**Call:**  
850-386-3435

**Fax:**  
850-386-4534  
**E-Mail:**  
sero@hsus.org  
**Web Page:**  
www.hsus.org/sero

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**Promoting the protection of all animals**

## Animal Care Expo

**When:** March 10-13, 2004

**Where:** Hyatt Regency Reunion, Dallas, Texas

**A**nimal Care Expo is a world-class educational conference combined with a full-scale international trade show, designed to help those in animal sheltering, care, control, and rescue do the best and most efficient jobs possible. Go to [www.hsus2.org/sheltering/general/expo\\_information.html](http://www.hsus2.org/sheltering/general/expo_information.html) to learn more.

*continued from "Florida Plate," page 1*  
will then distribute the funds to non-profit organizations providing free spay/neuter services to the public.

The Animal Friend license plate could make a tremendous impact on pet overpopulation in Florida. With just 40,000 license plates sold, up to one million dollars a year could be available in the grant fund to spay and neuter dogs and cats and hopefully reduce the number of unwanted pets who end up in animal shelters or roaming the streets.

If you want more information about joining the campaign for the Florida Animal Friend license plate, please contact our office.

The *SERO Regional News* is a publication of The Humane Society of the United States, Southeast Regional Office, 1624 Metropolitan Cir., Ste. B, Tallahassee, FL 32308; 850-386-3435. Laura Bevan, director. The office is open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and is closed on federal holidays.  
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